

by Peter Brown

I've never met Manor Folsom, but I know Manor Folsom. An email correspondence of more than 1,000 emails over seven years testifies to that.

When I first heard about the possibility of this film from Chris Goldmann, I thought to myself Manor should be in this. And then not long after that after my initial conversations with Jos, I wrote to Chris again explaining what I thought Jos was looking for and he wrote back: "Get Manor Folsom." The funny thing was I don't know if we ever had talked about Manor previously.

I first encountered Manor on the Usenet newsgroup Rec.Music.Dylan, which for all intents and purposes was the first international Bob Dylan discussion group and the initial place for Bob Dylan fans on the Internet. There was an email mailing list that was a mirror of the group called the HWY61-L Mailing List, and that was how early users of the Internet received the group and many people still do it that way. When I first got in the internet, I couldn't believe it, a little Bob Dylan digest full of all kinds of news would arrive several times a day.

Sometime during those first couple of years Manor appeared and wrote the most beautiful posts on Dylan. They were eloquent, and perhaps more important heartfelt. I'm not sure who wrote whom first, because back then I didn't necessarily save the earliest emails but once we started writing each other cautiously at first, we didn't stop.

Manor was interested that I played music, wanted to hear my album, which he wrote a gracious review of, and started telling me about his life in a deep way. He is from the deep, deep South, a small town in Georgia not all that far from the Florida border and he has strong feelings about that.

He tried playing music for awhile, was also a disc jockey on the radio, lived in New York City for awhile and in terms of life has been there and back. He is nine years younger than me in his mid-forties. In the liner notes to *John Wesley Harding*, Frank asks the Kings, "How far would you like to go in?" and the first King responds, "Not too far but just far enough so's we can say that we've been there." From what I know of him, Manor has definitely "been there."

I know he's written songs, but I've never heard any, he's too nice a guy for me to press in that direction. And while he would deny it and insist he struggles with it, what he really is though he'd never admit it is a writer. Way back if he put a comma in the wrong place he'd fret about it. In figuring out what to say about him earlier today I did a Google search of those old RMD posts - once upon a time there was a site called "Deja News"

which archived all the newsgroup posts and what is in those archives is of great importance. I copied about sixteen of Manor's posts and pasted them into Microsoft Word, and shortened the margins so it would use fewer pages and even with the margin changes, those posts came out to about 32 single-spaced pages. The man is a writer. Back in 2002, a review of a Dylan show he saw in Orlando, Florida was so beautiful that *Isis* at this point the longest running Dylan magazine (from England) wrote him and asked if they could print it as an article.

Manor was never the kind of poster who did it to see his name in print. He didn't post all that frequently, but when he did, he made it worth it. He eventually got tired of the meanness and the sniping and left the group a couple of years ago, returning once to post about a peace rally he went to when the war in Iraq began. The post was so spectacular (about Arlo Guthrie appearing at this little peace rally) that I sent it to *Expecting Rain*.

And yet Manor is a Southerner with strong feelings about the South. I found this out early on when we discovered we both loved the music of Jerry Lee Lewis. At some point I mentioned Nick Tosches' biography of Lewis, *Hellfire* and Manor wrote back that he didn't like it – he didn't appreciate the way Tosches appeared to make fun of Southerners. It was a learning experience for me because I just never thought about it from that perspective. At the same time there is a sense of humor in all this. I remember one email where he said to me, "You're pretty polite for a Yankee."

Yet even though he's from a tiny town his awareness of politics, his awareness of corporate intrusion came from somewhere else. His love of music came from his parents. His mother sang in country bands, his father a country music fan. Manor however is no typical country or Southern boy. He was so upset at the last presidential election I couldn't even write him about it for months.

When he finally bought his own home, he told me all about the renovations he was doing and doing himself, and what he had to go through to do them.

However, I think Manor's own words will speak best for him, and hopefully will show why I feel he can be an extremely important part of this film because this is not someone who at the end of a concert will simply say, good or bad show, this is someone who can articulate what he feels in a manner that is more than passionate.

From a very long post on the ethics of buying bootleg records:

If you're looking for an overriding ethical claim to the owning of bootlegs, it seems to me that it's one of laying claim to the enrichment that art brings to

our life. For me, such a claim is a compelling one and therefore I own bootlegs. Given that bootlegged material is material released against the artist's wishes, this claim cannot be an unsullied one. Even if one satisfied the finances due the performer and the songwriter, the invasion of privacy still exists, as well as the distortion that can come from removing live performances from their original context.

On the Grammy Telecast of "Lovesick":

My first night in town was the evening of the Grammy telecast and I got the TV on just in time to see the amazing rendition of Love Sick. All onscreen distractions aside, I found that performance to be the best television appearance since the Infidels era Letterman show. Aside from Time Out of Mind, I heard this song performed 3 times at shows in late October and while those were enjoyable, the song seems to be at a whole new level now.

In fact, having listened to the Grammy performance about a dozen times since, a thought occurred to me about the sameness of the set lists of late. I share the sense of disappointment when I see the set list showing relatively little variation but, in the case of Lovesick at least, it appears that much has been gained through performing the song at every show since the beginning of the fall US tour (or virtually every show - I haven't gone back and checked the set lists.) In the performances of Oct 29 & 30 (Athens) that I witnessed and that I now have copies of, I thought of Lovesick as a torch song and cast iron ballad needing the intimacy of a studio, or perhaps a very small club, to be performed at its best. In the Athens performances, I hear a band who knows the chord changes and a singer who knows the lyrics, but who are essentially referencing the album performance. Four months later on the Grammy telecast, the song has been recreated - the chord changes and the instrumentation are the same, the melody is essentially unchanged, but it sounds as if the song has been reinvented for/through live performance from a torch song to a lamentation of the apocalypse. The band's playing is dark and scary on the one hand, joyous on the other (the joy coming from having so effectively nailed the song) and the singer sounds as if he's gotten to end of Lincoln County Road and only to have found Armageddon anyway.

On John Wesley Harding:

And while 31 years after its release the album stands easily on its own, I think it's worthwhile to recall the context within which Dylan presented it. The last work he recorded and released before the motorcycle wreck was the live "Tom Thumb's Blues" (as the B-side of the "I Want You" single,) for my money the most intense musical expression ever of a man standing on the precipice of psychic dissolution. John Wesley Harding was what he had

to say after he jumped. (And, as if I haven't risked sounding pretentious enough already, try this on for size - the singer who sings Tom Thumb in May '66 makes me fear for his soul. The one who sings John Wesley Harding makes me fear for mine.)

For years, Dylan was criticized for not making another Highway 61/Blonde on Blonde. For anyone who cared to listen though, John Wesley Harding was there as an explanation of how impossible that was.

On Dylan's thoughts on Woody Guthrie:

The Never Ending Tour Years have seen Dylan often dipping into the body of old folk / traditional songs that served among his earliest inspirations.

Even so, I can't think of the last time he covered the singer most often cited as his strongest influence. I'm speaking, of course, of Woody Guthrie. Is it possible he hasn't done a Guthrie tune since the '68 memorial concert? He was on the Guthrie/Leadbelly Tribute LP that came out when - in '89? When was the last time Bob did a Guthrie song in concert? Was "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie" just what the title says it is?

Or, how about this - maybe the young Dylan felt that having so closely associated himself with the Guthrie identity, he needed to then distance himself from it to an almost equal degree. This seems likely, or at least understandable. All these years later though, it would seem that he would have a real affection for that music. We all love the music of our youth, and Dylan seems particularly connected to the music that first excited him. He may feel this way about Woody Guthrie. My guess is that he probably does. He occasionally does "Song To Woody." Do you think there's any significance in the absence of Guthrie covers, though?

On *Planet Waves*:

To my thinking, Planet Waves is one the great rock records of the early 70's. There is so much to love there. For starters, the sound of The Band. The songs sound fully fleshed out, yet there's not one overplayed note on the record. The songs sound spontaneous and yet finished at the same time, as though the arrangements were being worked out on the spot and through some sort of serendipity all of the right choices were made the first time (to me, this is really remarkable - while I'm a big fan of Bob's "keep it fresh" approach to arrangements, there's usually at least some small price to be paid to have it that way. Not so this time. Garth Hudson's organ and Rick Danko's bass are the real standouts for me.)

I hear Planet Waves as a landmark record in terms of Bob's singing. I know everybody hears these things in different ways, but to my ear it's the first record to fully display his mature voice (allowing for the Pat Garret soundtrack as something of a precursor,) the man's voice that follows the boy-genius voice that came before. As brilliant as the earlier voice is - and if you said it was the greatest rock voice ever committed to record, I wouldn't argue with you - there was often a hint of a sort of petulance to it. The voice on Planet Waves sounds too old for petulance. If that sounds hokey, then maybe this is better - it's the voice that sounds like it's reached a mature sense of loss and limitations. (It points the way to the '76 Hard Rain era voice, and if you ever need to torment yourself over the loss and limitations that come from love, for my money you need go no further than there.)

On Dylan's guitar playing in the '90s (this post actually goes into all of his guitar playing but it's several pages long):

Then around '95 or so, Dylan decided he was the lead guitarist. I'll never forget a show I saw in Austin in '95 or '96. John Jackson had become resigned to his new role, though his demeanor seemed to communicate a "I'm looking for a new gig" feeling. Towards the end of the show, Bob called up Charlie Sexton as a guest. The way my friend and I both saw it, the song started and Charlie seemed to waiting on the break to step out and play a lead. Jackson had a smirk on his face, as though he knew something Charlie didn't. When the break came, you could see Charlie get ready, kind of the way a pitcher winds up in baseball. But that's as far as got. Bob took the lead, and Charlie kind of sank back. And Jackson broke out in a laugh. A verse or two later, the sequence pretty much repeated itself, Jackson laughing all the harder, then putting his arm around Charlie and saying something into his ear. The way it looked to us, Jackson seemed to be communicating a "you see what I've been living lately?" kind of air. After a song or two, Charlie left the stage, Bob didn't seemed to notice at first, though later he called him back out. When Charlie later joined the band a few years later, I remembered that Austin show and thought "well, at least he knows what he's getting into."

From the a review of Orlando, Florida Concert in 2002 (the one *Isis* published):

Looking like the spiritual descendant of Hank Williams that he is, Bob Dylan walked onto a stage in Orlando Thursday night, playing his first concert of 2002. He picked up where he left off at the end of 2001, with a show that combined strong versions of some of his best known songs with a healthy

dollop of the new Love & Theft tunes that were the centerpiece of the fall shows.

He looked great, wearing a black western suit with white piping, and a big, off white cowboy hat. His body language alone was enough to sustain my interest for the full show. He danced, pranced, wiggled, and even ended the set down on one knee. I kept waiting for someone to come throw a cape over his shoulders and lead him off the stage James Brown style. I sat a considerable distance from the stage though, and with the cowboy hat obscuring his face and the crazy leg steps and jerks, it was the old film clips of Hank Williams that kept coming to mind. It was as though he were bodily throwing himself into the music, and doing it with an abandon that exceeded that of any of his younger incarnations.

(conclusion of same post):

And so, the show in Orlando? Well, it was great. It could have been better perhaps, the set list could have been more adventurous, the harmonica breaks could've been more focused, the singing could have reach harder for the transcendent maybe. But in the end, it just didn't matter, because he was obviously into what he was doing, digging himself, and he's playing shows all through the coming months, as the winter turns to spring. Any one of them will be a treat to hear, and some of them are sure to reach that plane beyond, when the music is so right it leaves you giddy. I sat in the audience Thursday night and wondered if I'd be lucky enough to ever see him again. Bob Dylan has said that the Never Ending Tour is not never ending. He'll wake up one day and say "enough." He has played so much, and in so many places for so long, that it's easy to lose sight of just how special is this thing that he does, but as I sat in that crowd in Orlando, it did come to me, how after all of the incredible art created by Bob Dylan, and after all he has lived through, what a remarkable thing it was to look down at the stage and see this 60 year old genius doing his weird, brilliant combination of the jitterbug rag, the Georgia cawl, and the Hank Williams shimmy, as he sang the night away.

From a fairly crazy thread on Pecan nuts because of the mention of Pecan pie on "Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum":

Growing up in Georgia, it was definitely "pee-can." Pe-kahn was the ignorant, Yankee way of saying it (though we expected little better from people who couldn't come up with a better word for the second person plural than "you-guys.") My sisters and I spent untold winter hours in the pee-can orchard, picking up the pee-cans. When you filled up a Maxwell House coffee can, you had earned a nickel.

And Manor's last post on the War in its entirety:

Feb 16 2003, 10:22 am
Newsgroups: **rec.music.dylan**
From: **M...@snez.net (Manor)** -
Date: **16 Feb 2003 10:02:05 -0800**
Local: **Sun, Feb 16 2003 10:02 am**
Subject: **Blowin' in the Wind**

Yesterday, millions of people in cities around the world turned out to demonstrate against the looming war in Iraq. And, in my sleepy little Florida beach town, about 500 of us gathered in a riverside park, and then marched a short route to the steps of City Hall, where a series of speakers were scheduled to appear. The list consisted of local poets, activists, and educators, several of whom were making their first public speech. It would be hard to imagine a more ramshackle affair; even so, the atmosphere was upbeat and the weather was beautiful, with clear skies and a gentle ocean breeze. I've lived in this town for 7 years, but have led such a private existence here, I know hardly anyone other than my co-workers. Still, I looked around to see if I could spot any friends or familiar faces.

As I scanned the small crowd, my eyes finally fell on one person who did seem oddly familiar. He had a lion's mane of curly gray hair, gathered loosely on his back by a ribbon, the comfortable rounded shouldered appearance of a guy who had been skinny in youth, and then slowly added pounds over the years, a Hawaiian shirt, dark glasses, and across his back was strapped an acoustic guitar. My eyes rested briefly upon him, moved on, then snapped back. Suddenly, he looked real familiar, the kind of familiarity that takes years to feel. A feeling came to me like seeing someone I had once seen as a young child, like maybe a friend of my big sister, or an older cousin who had once come around the house long ago. Then, a name came tentatively to my lips.
"Arlo?"

That's who the guy looked like, alright, he looked like Arlo Guthrie. It made no sense for it to actually be Arlo Guthrie, though, and it was much easier to figure that it was a local musician who shared the same general air of the benevolent, ageing hippie. Arlo Guthrie's name definitely was not on the list of those who were to address the crowd. Nor was he scheduled to appear in concert anywhere at all close to here, which, had he been, could have provided a feasible explanation for him being in town and dropping by the rally. Whoever he was, he had nothing remotely resembling an entourage. The only people gathered around him were a woman his own age who appeared to be his wife or girlfriend, and some small kids, maybe his children, or more likely grandchildren. Some close relationship seemed undeniable, because they had they same head of hair (though of course

theirs was not gray.) The same kind of hair you see in those pictures of Woody Guthrie.

Then, the master of ceremonies, a woman who is the main host of the local NPR affiliate, came to the microphone. And, after some very brief welcoming remarks to the crowd, she said "and now, to sing a song, we're very happy to have . . . Arlo Guthrie!"

In the news accounts on the rallies I read this morning, as many as a million people turned out in Rome. There were said to be 750,000 in London, and 500,000 thousand in Madrid. In New York City, where the crowd was estimated to be as large as 400,000, I read that Richie Havens, who had played on the same stage as Arlo at Woodstock, performed his song "Freedom." And, Pete Seeger, who often partnered with Woody Guthrie, made an appearance. Here in Melbourne, as our crowd of 500 looked on, Arlo Guthrie made his way to the "stage." The stage actually consisted of a 6 foot collapsible office table that shook nervously, with a step ladder set next to it. The sound system consisted of a \$25 microphone plugged into a 15 watt guitar amp. The mike stand looked at though it might topple over at any minute. It was too short for Arlo to comfortably sing into, and too tall to readily pick up his guitar. Arlo scrunched up into a funny, but very uncomfortable looking posture, holding his guitar up next to his face, with the neck pointed to the sky, and tentatively strummed a few chords, then stopped and with a look of real concern on his face said "this is the most treacherous stage I've ever been on in my life."

Gamely, he started again, first laying down a rudimentary rhythm on a C chord, and then he began to sing: "How many roads must a man walk down, before you call him a man?"

The crowd began to sing along, scattered voices on the verse, and virtually everyone on the chorus. And, feeling like a goofball, I did something that I never do at performances - I began to sing along, too. The voices grew louder as the song progressed, reaching their height on the closing lines of the last verse:

"How many deaths will it take 'till he knows, that too many people have died? The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind . . . "

I started feeling giddy, and kind of ridiculously warm and happy. For a moment, I thought I was going to start crying. The song ended, Arlo said "thank you," and then turned and very carefully edged his way to the side of the table/stage and came back down the step ladder.

I've heard that song hundreds of times, so many times that long ago I had stopped being able to really hear it. It is, of course, considered one of the great protest anthems, something I've always thought of as damning the song with faint praise. And yet, for all the times I've heard the song, this was the first time I'd ever had a first hand experience of it being "used" for that purpose as an anthem at a protest. I was taken quite by surprise at just how moving it was. The song was doing so many things. On one level, here I was in a town where I've lived for several years, but never made any real effort to make it home, and now for the first time I was feeling like I belonged to this community of people I sang with. I looked up at the stage as Arlo sang and thought of the tradition he represents, and that he perpetuates, and as we shared this song that we both loved, I felt myself tied into that tradition, felt myself belonging it. And, I thought of the poet who had written these simple, elegant words, that so clearly gave voice to the feeling that was at the center of this gathering, and I felt a sense of huge gratitude for this gift he had given, this song that had been the catalyst for all these feelings.

You know, people of every political ilk lay claim to Dylan. But despite the Newt Gingriches of the world, it became clear to me as Arlo sang Dylan's song, that such ideas are pretty silly. This much I know - it is unimaginable to me for that song to be performed at any kind of rally the other side might hold.

I also thought about the way some people see the Bush family. With Jeb as the governor of my state, and with George the father and George the son occupying the White House, there are some who view the Bushes as a sort of American royalty. But when I consider the work and influence of Woody Guthrie, then look at Arlo and realize how he is nearing 40 years in his patriotic journey, and then see how his children Sara Lee and Abe are carrying on the legacy, it seems plain to me that the Guthries come much closer to representing the best values of my country's past, and the most generous aspirations for its future.

The rest of the program was sometimes kind of amateurish, but always heartfelt, and at times genuinely moving. A U.S. citizen of Iraqi descent spoke of his mother, sisters, and nieces who live in Iraq, and the awful fear they are feeling as they wait for the bombing to start. A retired Air Force Lt Colonel who had flown over 100 missions in Vietnam appeared in his dress uniform, and spoke scornfully about how readily "leaders" who worked hard to avoid combat duty when they were of draft age, are now quite ready to send our troops into harm's way. When all the speakers were done, Arlo was called to the stage again. He said he had a final song, but first he wanted to say (I'm paraphrasing mightily here) that as he looked at us, he saw people from all walks of life, people of all ages and colors, people in different kinds of dress, and who spoke in different accents, and how our

diversity represented America, and how our coming together in common cause represented what was best about America, and how we should be proud of that. Then, he raised his guitar and played the Ed McCurdy song "Last Night I had the Strangest Dream":

*Last night I had the strangest dream I'd ever dreamed before I
dreamed the world had all agreed To put an end to war . . .
And the people in the streets below Were dancing 'round and 'round
While swords and guns and uniforms Were scattered on the ground.*